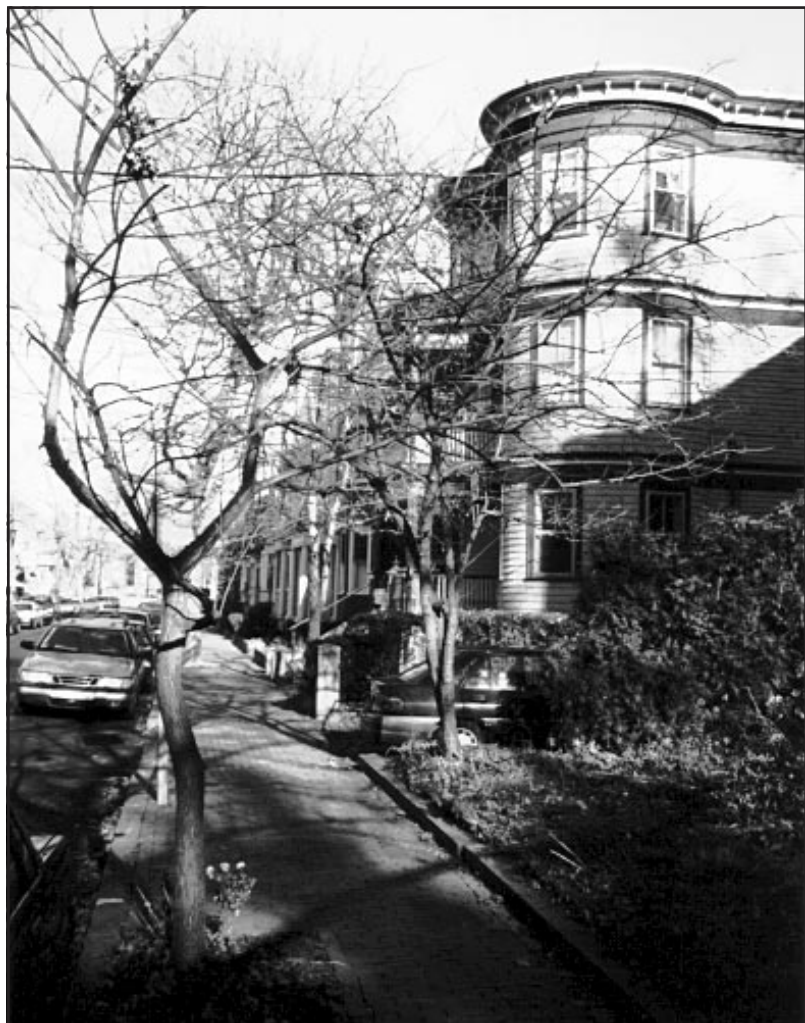

MID-CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY



A JOINT REPORT OF THE
MID-CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY COMMITTEE AND
THE CAMBRIDGE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

M I D - C A M B R I D G E

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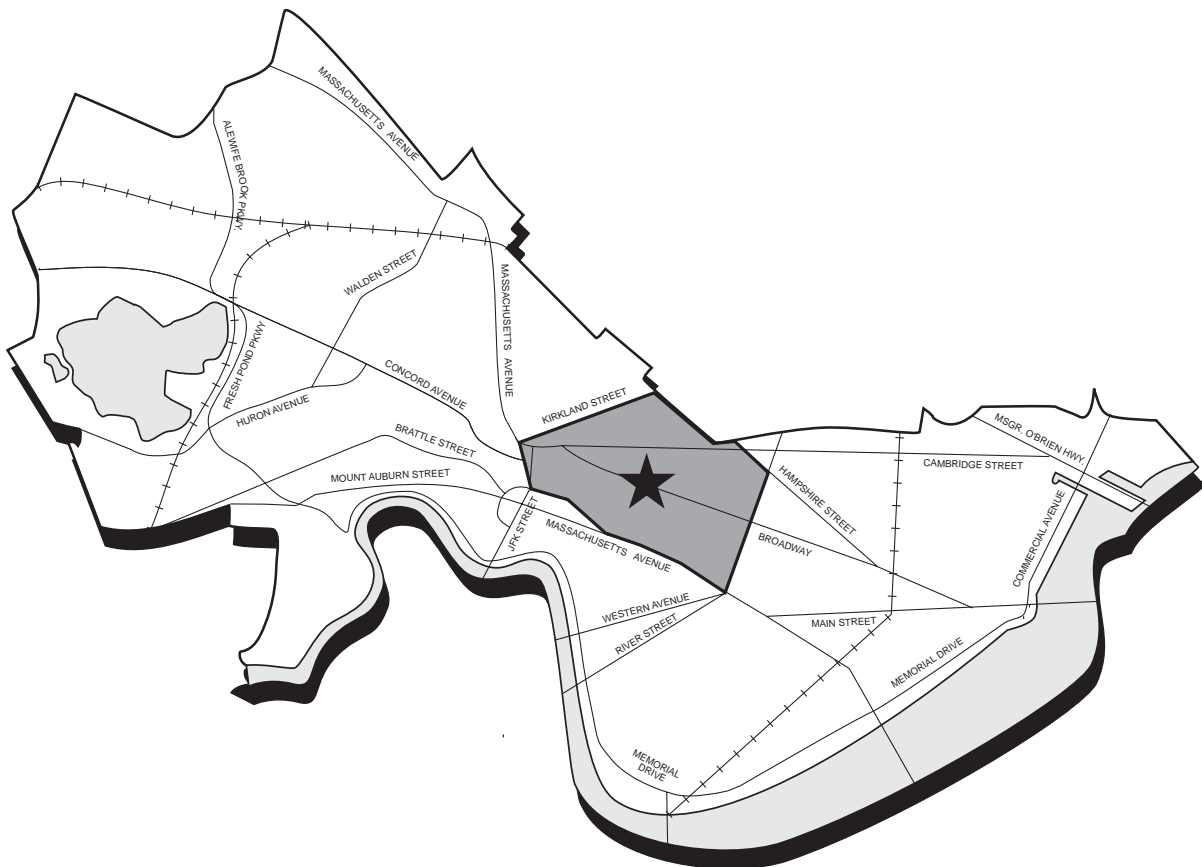
John Pitkin, resident, Fayette Street

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

City of Cambridge
Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Location



Introduction

THE NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY PROCESS

During the 1980s the City of Cambridge, along with the surrounding region, witnessed a wave of commercial growth and economic development. This growth expanded the City's tax base and created new jobs and opportunities for its residents. While many residents welcomed this prosperity, it also brought about an increasing awareness of issues which are of concern to neighborhood residents: increased building density, traffic congestion and parking problems, the rising cost of housing, inadequate open space, and the threat to neighborhood character and quality of life.

Since 1988, the Community Development Department (CDD) through its neighborhood planning program has conducted comprehensive studies in nine of the City's neighborhoods. The object of the neighborhood studies is to identify major planning problems and concerns through a joint CDD and community study committee and formulate recommendations for their solutions. The studies address issues such as traffic and parking, housing affordability and home ownership, neighborhood commercial areas and employment, park maintenance and rezoning of areas now inappropriately zoned. As part of each neighborhood study, CDD collects data on demographic changes since 1980, as well as changes in housing markets, land use, and development potential in each neighborhood.

For each study, the City Manager appoints a committee of neighborhood residents, small business owners, and civic leaders, along with

staff from the Community Development Department, to review the data, identify problems that exist in the neighborhood, and make recommendations as to how to resolve these problems. The recommendations are presented to the City Council, and, where appropriate, are incorporated into the work programs of City departments for implementation over the next several years.

THE MID-CAMBRIDGE STUDY

In the Summer of 1993, CDD staff placed advertisements in the local papers seeking Mid-Cambridge residents to join the upcoming study committee. Out of 29 residents applying, City Manager Robert Healy named 12 applicants to the committee. The newly named members came from all of the different parts of the neighborhood with the aim of representing the demographic diversity of Mid-Cambridge. Some of the members were lifelong residents, while others had lived there less than ten years.

The Mid-Cambridge Study Committee met weekly for eight months from October 1993 until May 1994. The Committee reviewed, discussed, and debated issue of housing, parks, transportation, economic development, land use, zoning and urban design. They listened to a range of speakers from representatives of educational institutions to City staff responsible for traffic and zoning policies, and took walking tours to see each part of the neighborhood. Through the discussions, they identified problems around the neighborhood and worked together to come up with recommendations for each topic. After a presentation of the

preliminary recommendations to the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association (MCNA), the Committee met over a period of two months in a joint group with five representatives from the MCNA to review the preliminary recommendations along with additional recommendations submitted by members of the Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association.

During the study period, two issues with significant ramifications for Mid-Cambridge were being played out, one statewide, the other citywide. The end of rent control, put forward in statewide referendum Proposition 9, was proposed in the middle of the study committee process and voted into effect near the end of their work. While the recommendations reflect the knowledge of the proposed change, the actual changes which have occurred and are continuing throughout Mid-Cambridge and the city are beginning to become evident just as this study is being published. The other issue, the consideration of the renovation of the main library was also under consideration by a separate committee during the end of the study committee's work, and continues unresolved today.

At the end of the process, the Committee produced recommendations ranging from creation of an informational handbook listing services and resources of the City's institutions to zoning changes to reduce excess infill housing. The Committee offers this study and its recommendations to the Mid-Cambridge community as a basis for long-term planning.

THE CITY OF CAMBRIDGE GROWTH POLICY

The Neighborhood Study process is seen as an extension of the City's Growth Policy document, "Towards a Sustainable Cambridge," which outlines the City's planning assumptions and policies in the areas of land use, housing, transportation, economic development, open space and urban design. The document was drafted by CDD staff in 1992-3 after a series of workshops with citizen, business and institutional representatives. It recognizes that the city's diversity of land uses, densities and population groups should be retained and strengthened. The document also calls for careful development of the city's evolving industrial districts, such as Alewife and lower Cambridgeport.

While the growth policy document is comprehensive, it does not prescribe land uses or designs for specific sites. Each of the city's 13 neighborhoods has distinct needs and resources which can be identified and addressed through neighborhood studies and the city's planning policies. The Growth Policy and neighborhood studies complement each other by informing the community of important issues, recommending a plan of action to address the concerns, and utilizing current policies to implement change.